

From Brown to Green: Rome seeks EPA funding to tackle Brownfields

The City of Rome is applying for \$200,000 in US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Cleanup Grant funding to assist with the cleanup and redevelopment of the former Nolan Manufacturing site in East Rome. To make this happen, the City is looking for community input on where and how the money should be spent.

The City of Rome will be hosting a public meeting on **Wednesday, October 13th, at 4:00 pm in the Basement Training Room of City Hall**. There, the public will be invited to view maps, brownfields data, and the draft applications to the EPA for funding. City representatives are hoping to take comments and ideas regarding this and other brownfield-related issues that the community is facing.

“Brownfields” are properties whose expansion, redevelopment, or reuse may be complicated by the presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Typically, the sites are former industrial or commercial properties where operations or processes may have resulted in environmental impairment. With a rich history in manufacturing – particularly, heavy metal (copper, steel, wire, and cable, that is) Rome has plenty. While the City was originally built *by* these industries, the community has spent years trying to re-build *around* these hulking relics and contaminated properties. The former General Cable, Rome Cable, Nolan Manufacturing Buildings are just a few of the 100+ potential brownfields in downtown alone.

Over the past ten years, the community has taken a strategic and methodic approach to brownfield cleanup and redevelopment. With funding from the Federal and State government, properties once shunned and ignored as “eyesores” are now being recognized as “opportunity” areas. By identifying strategic brownfield sites and studying the properties around them, Rome has discovered their true potential as evidenced by the new American Alloy Steel building. This massive infill project attracted millions in private investment that retained real jobs, added value to the tax rolls, and visually enhanced a corner that sat blighted for nearly fifty years along Harbor Way in East Rome.

For three years, the Department of Community & Economic Development has been performing an in-depth analysis of the transportation systems, housing, infrastructure, communications, natural resources, and land use in a target area which includes neighborhoods in North, East and South Rome which include downtown and waterfront (Erie Canal & Mohawk River) areas leading to Fort Stanwix National Monument. The study, funded by the Department of State, has combined existing data and community input to induce investment generated by a Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) plan. In the planning process, the City of Rome has used an unprecedented \$7 million in grant funding for implementation projects that range from industrial development to microenterprise assistance to housing rehabilitation.

One of the fruits of the BOA study was an inventory of potential brownfields and analysis of strategic sites within the Brownfield Opportunity Area. This is why the City is applying for \$400,000 in Brownfields

Assessment Grant funding to perform environmental site assessments on other properties, mostly vacant, that continue to blight the neighborhoods and pose a perceived threat to public health and safety. The City is also looking to National Grid to partner with on such ambitious endeavors as the Nolan project and the Grand Hotel redevelopment project.

Abandoned, blighted, and contaminated industrial sites, identified in studies as the number one obstacle to redevelopment, are now being recognized as valuable resources in downtown and waterfront revitalization plans and projects. What is unique about Rome's plan of action is its focus on how the surrounding neighborhoods and commercial districts function as a system; and how abandoned brownfields can prevent neighborhoods from growing, prospering, and thriving. With this in mind, it shifts the focus from the actual contaminants to the people, businesses, and action.

Having performed extensive environmental site assessments and remediation on four high-priority sites, one site has garnered a significant amount of interest in redevelopment. Upon investigation, the presence of PCB's (insert scientific name here) and other hazardous material is obstructing future development efforts.

This is why the City of Rome is applying for \$200,000 in USEPA funding to assist with the cleanup of these contaminants – as part of a larger redevelopment project. The grant requires a 20% local match (already secured through a state grant), and the City would like public involvement on how this money is going to be spent. They are also hoping to do a bit of education - to those interested - on what it means to actually investigate, cleanup, and redevelop a brownfield.

Those who cannot make the meeting but still wish to give their input may do so taking a quick Brownfield survey on the City's web site at www.romenewyork.com. For more information, you may contact the Department of Community & Economic Development at 339-7643 or by email at jsharrino@romecitygov.com.

Possible Contacts for Steve Jones:

Dan Murphy, National Grid

Linda Clark, National Grid

David MacLeod, Department of State

Joe Ferlo, Main Streets Alliance

Next article: Anatomy of a Brownfield Cleanup